

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

This paragraph from the *Church of Ireland Gazette* contains late, but good, news:

"The Church of Ireland Chaplain at the Curragh reports an interesting happening on Christmas Day, when they had a somewhat unique service in the Curragh Church. The representatives of three armies, two of which are engaged in deadly strife, were present. Besides the soldiers of the Eire army, who almost filled one side of the church, there were both British and German airmen. At least four different branches of the Christian Church were represented: the Church of Ireland, the Church of England, the Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church. The chaplain writes: 'We were all greatly thrilled by this microcosm of the reunion of Christendom in the midst of a world-wide war.' The authorities were naturally nervous at the prospect of such a service and, at first, insisted upon a special service being arranged in the Internment Camp for the Germans, but they (the Germans) objected to this, as they held that 'the service was too sacred to have at their living quarters.' Permission was finally obtained for all to attend the same service."

## NATIONAL DAYS OF PRAYER

This letter has to go to press before any news is available as to the way in which the Day of Prayer on Sunday last was observed. It may, however, be news to many of you that in the eighteenth century, when our national religion is commonly supposed to have been at an extremely low ebb, National Days of Prayer were observed in a style that makes our style look very easy-going. They were held on a weekday, not on Sunday, thus breaking into everyone's routine and impinging on the public imagination, and they were days of fasting as well as of prayer. Is the milder form of observance to which we are now invited a mark of progress, or of decline, or only of a change in social conditions?

On Friday, February 16th, 1759, when a French invasion was threatened, John Wesley made this entry in his journal: "Being the Public Fast, I preached at five at Wandsworth; at nine and three in the church at Spitalfields; and at half-hour past eight in the Foundery. Every place of public worship was crowded on this, as on the two preceding fast-days." And again, during the war with America in 1776: "Friday the 13th (of December) was the national fast. It was observed not only throughout the city, but (I was afterwards informed) throughout the nation, with the utmost solemnity. I shall not wonder if God should now interpose and send us prosperity, since at length we are not too proud to acknowledge 'there is a God that judgeth the earth'."

When we have another Day of Prayer, might not the nation be summoned to a form of observance at least as exacting as that of our Hanoverian ancestors, though of course adapted to present conditions? Would the nation take it? Would the Christians take it? The fact that exacting demands are being made upon our people in the ordinary course of events, is hardly a reason for maintaining mildness in religion; but rather the contrary. Stern times call for stern measures all round.



## SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND

The complaint is sometimes made that the C.N-L. is too vague or general in its statements. Here is a fairly definite illustration of the conditions against which we mean to wage war on the home front. It is an extract from a letter from "a student in arms" which was printed in *The Cambridge Review* (March 7th, 1941). X—— is somewhere in England.

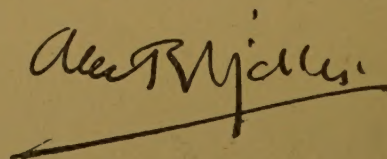
"I find it difficult to describe the awful desolation that blights X——. It is very dirty and smoky, the air being full of chemicals. Everything is grimy, the shops are dingy, and the people all seem rather tired and bewildered. But apart from outward appearances, the life of the place is such that it leaves one feeling very depressed. X—— is full of prostitutes under sixteen who hang about the billets. There is one dingy cinema in the place, and a big hall in which various social activities take place. Apart from these, the only places of refuge are fish-and-chip shops and pubs. Brawls are quite common, and the favourite weapon is the bottle. There is a church, well-kept inside, but as I could only go to Evensong about once a week, I do not know whether more than ten people ever attend. But the worst thing about these parts is the upbringing of children. They stay up till 9 or 10 at night, hearing their parents quarrelling or stuffing themselves with fish and chips, dropping off to sleep by the fire, then waking and crying. They live in the streets, or hang about the soldiers' billets, picking up every sort of trick and habit. By the time they are fifteen they are 'grown-up' in the sense that they live just like men and will never become any more fully developed. So it is difficult to see how there can be any improvement for many years to come. It is very dismal to think that for well over a century people have been living in places like this, with no hope of any improvement, with no realisation that there could be any radical improvement or change in their way of life. It is not that they are poor financially, but their whole life is so narrow and mean. There exists much rough kindness everywhere in the North, but it is almost swamped by the grim squalor."

This week's Supplement says something about "Reconstruction during Resistance" in China; what about "Reconstruction during Resistance" in Britain?

## THE SUPPLEMENT

The Rev. E. R. Hughes, who is a Congregationalist minister, has been Deputy Professor of Chinese in the University of Oxford since 1934. Previously he had spent seventeen years in the interior of China, and afterwards served on the Boxer Indemnity Board as one of its Presidents.

Yours sincerely,



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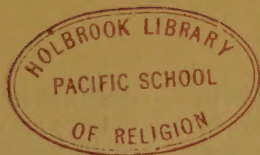
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MARCH 26TH 1941



## CHINA—A SPIRITUAL PHENOMENON FOR THE CHURCH

By E. R. HUGHES

I want to open up what seems to me an almost unexplored field of Christian thinking and acting. As I write, I have more in mind those C.N.-L. readers who are deeply persuaded that thought *must* be translated into action. So, a plain question to men who want to think plainly: does "China" count morally in the world which we envisage to-day? Is she a moral asset or a moral liability? Your answer—by general acclamation I think—will be Yes, an asset. Then: did you regard her as such ten years or even four years ago? The answer here I think from most Englishmen, Christian and semi-Christian alike, will be, No: though a few might commit themselves to saying, a potential asset. But, how extraordinary this is! In four short years so great a change in public opinion! Yes, but those years have been very searching, illuminating years for us and the Chinese people. All world-conscious peoples have had their faith in the moral order of the universe assailed.

I go a step further. Last July England closed the Burma Road. When she did this, a pit was yawning at her feet, the pit of military defeat—not conquest of the British Commonwealth, for, as was suggested in the case of France, the fight for freedom could be carried on overseas. In stepping back from this pit we pushed the Chinese people one place nearer to it. Hence the religious question: is England more important for the future of the world than China? If we think so, and I believe that the overwhelming majority of Christian British people do think so, to what extent is that a political judgment, to what extent a religious?

### THE RESISTANCE AND RENAISSANCE OF CHINA

I think that readers of the C.N.-L. are nearly ready to face this root question (cf., e.g., the Christmas Supplement). Many of us are puzzled, even bewildered. A sense of

main spiritual direction has not yet emerged for us in our England. This, I submit, is immensely perturbing. At a time such as the present we can only assume that God is trying with incalculable insistence to show men the way out and the way on. That being so, the cause of our lack of new direction may well be that we are looking at some immediate, God-filled event with the eyes of the flesh and not the eyes of the spirit. That is why I am moved to point out one outstanding event, the astonishing resistance by the Chinese people, and to ask whether this resistance is of God or is not. To this question some will answer unhesitatingly, that, considering the history of China and the relatively insignificant part that the Church of our Lord has played in that history, the power of this extraordinary resistance cannot be one derived from God: the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is it true that only believers in Jesus can receive miraculous power from God? Take, for example, "In the beginning was the Word. . . : all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . ." The passage goes on to say, still in relation to the un-incarnate Word, that "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." "The darkness": is it impossible that the Church (or Churches) in Europe are blind to something which God is doing elsewhere?

First consider China. Her resistance against an immeasurably superior army, navy and air force, as against all other disruptive forces, has been incredibly staunch and incredibly united. After defeat in four supposedly vital areas the resistance has been, not of the sporadic irredentist type as in Manchuria, but one of national action, on a vast scale directly implicating the daily life of some three hundred million people. It is not only military resistance. There has been "Reconstruction during Resistance."



The changing of the centre of national life to the far west has involved the most herculean tasks of social and economic readjustment. Factory machinery had to be transported into the west and scientists and technicians mobilized to deal with problems of raw materials and home-constructed gadgets. Village industries have been revived on a completely co-operative basis and every month \$9,000,000 worth of consumer goods are now being produced—Universities and schools have been developed under war conditions. Actually a new China—it is claimed a better China—is being brought into existence. This is not to say that all the people in Free China are heroes, or that the economic situation goes from strength to strength. Very far from it. As in England, inefficiency in Government offices has not been exorcised. Men with money are still to be found taking mean advantage of those without. Also in the four great centres of North and East and Central and South China the nation's oppressors have been able to find Quislings to serve their ends. Yet behind all this shines the fact of the nation's dogged unity, the people's fortitude and cheerfulness under the strain of aerial bombardment, the sacrificial patriotism of illiterate peasants in the vast guerilla areas, and the eager volunteering of rich families' spoil darlings to live in caves on bread and scrape whilst they are trained for organizational work in dangerous districts.

As we know, cruel adversity only too often has a demoralising effect on a people and their leaders. The spirit of *saue qui peut* lays hold of them : faith in their best traditions is devitalised. That is what the Japanese counted on happening in China. Also, in the light of what the Western Powers did and did not do, it is unquestionable that not one of them was prepared to take a chance on "China" coming through, on the process of her being beaten to her knees having the very opposite effect. No-one believed that old inter-provincial jealousies might fade away and a leadership be produced which could mobilise over such vast areas the people's will and ability to save their mother-land from a demoralising tyranny. I remember during the Shanghai War (1932) Mr. Matsuoka, the present Foreign Minister at Tokyo, saying to me that the way to treat the Chinese was to hit them hard and hit them again, and then butter up

their leaders with compliments and open ways to them for making money ; in that way you could get anything you wanted out of the Chinese people. Mr. Matsuoka must know better now.

So "China" counts morally to-day. She even counts militarily, for if Japan invaded the Straits Settlements, China could help with two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand seasoned machine gunners. So also economically. She is opening up her undeveloped resources and building industry and communications with a view not only to present needs but also future developments, and she counts for the miracle both of her endurance and her accomplishment under shattering conditions.

### BRITISH POLICY AND ATTITUDE

We now turn to England, our England, my England for which I thank God, in which I believe under God. We must go back to 1932 when the economic blizzard was well under way. Two events have to be noted. One was the Manchurian case before the League Assembly. What concerns us is that England's representative there set forth all the extenuating circumstances on the aggressor's side and soft-pedalled all the unextenuating circumstances. Above all, England's judgment on the issue was published to the world as one of finding certain legal doubts as to her obligation to the attacked party and of having no reason to fear that the attacker intended to interfere with her trade interests. We allowed that impression to stand. As I have said, China did not seem to count, not in the way Japan did. There is no need to say more. Even since Munich scores of newspapers and periodicals have rubbed it in that "Manchuria" was followed by "Abyssinia," and the Anschluss, etc., etc.

The other event of the year, the event for the British peoples, was the Ottawa Conference. Our Prime Minister went himself to Ottawa, leaving his Foreign Secretary to attend to the Far-East and the political state of Europe. England was feeling the economic depression, not so badly as some countries, but badly enough. Mr. Baldwin received an ovation at the Conference for the statesmanlike way in which he was pulling the Empire together. All the Dominions undertook to terminate at the earliest opportunity all trade agreements which gave other countries advantages over the mother country and her partners.



I suppose that nine-tenths of us in England accepted the Conference decisions without misgivings, many of us indeed with thankfulness to God. Those decisions seemed so business-like and reasonable. A pity of course that the last relics of our free-trade traditions had to go, but with customs barriers continually going up everywhere, what would you! After all it was essential to maintain our standard of living. True! How true! And yet "Ottawa" was the declaration to the world that, whatever might happen to other peoples' larders, the British Commonwealth with its possession of one-fifth of the world's surface and its unequalled control of essential materials was going to see to it that its larder was stocked first. When we heard that the solid German business men had so amazingly decided to support that wild-cat adventurer, Adolf Hitler, did we connect the two events? When the news came that the great business houses in Japan which had started by being very dubious over the Tanaka policy in Asia, had come round and were backing the Army, did we see the reasonableness of getting adequate raw materials and essential foodstuffs under one's own control? When we knew that the Nazis had coined the word *Lebensraum*, did we think of the statement in the forefront of the Ottawa Minutes, the expression of the hope that these decisions would encourage the rest of the world to follow our example!

## HARMONY AND PRESUMPTION

Do we allow that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander? Hitler is persuaded that he can prick the bubble of the British Empire and clear out of the world the effete traditions of our national life; against which we set our conviction that the moral order of the universe is on our side. It is exactly a hundred years since the Opium War. That war was the beginning of a long series of wars and "incidents" which were aimed to demonstrate to the Chinese Government and people that they were unreasonable in claiming to use their economic resources only for their own benefit and to preserve their own way of life. And what about that way of life and the tradition behind it? To the Chinese of a hundred years ago their civilisation was the premier civilisation in the world. They believed that the moral order of the universe demanded just that. Had it not always been their

tradition that the organisation of the state and the family must be in harmony with that order? Did they not believe that government must in the first place be by power of example and moral suasion? When they came to know the European order of society they were amazed to find that it did not regard the scholar, the cultivator of spiritual values, as first in importance, the farmer as next, and the man of commerce and the soldier as least. To judge by their principles and ideals they had some ground for their conviction that they were indispensable to the world.

I am not trying to exalt China above Britain, but to see the two great national entities as equal under God's laws. Thus the Chinese had become self-righteous, blandly superior, regarding their national sins and weaknesses as peccadilloes. They had to pay for this through long years in which their amour propre was sharply wounded. The upshot was that they set themselves to school with the peoples they had despised: an act of humility on the part of proud scholars. We can only take one lesson from the thirty years (1896-1926) which followed. It is that the vocal part of the nation worshipped the current Western idea of freedom and worshipped it wrongly, with the result that the national tie sagged and the people which had prided itself on knowing more about unity than any other suffered the humiliation of being branded as the most factious of nations. Then they began to go back to their old spiritual tradition that the basis of a society is "the common man and the common woman and their apprehension of the Way." They began painfully to rebuild their unity and freedom in the world of today. They realised that freedom without unity is servitude, that the price of unity is the voluntary submission of the individual to the well-being of the whole community, and that freedom involves wise planning for the production and distribution of the nation's wealth. They reaffirmed their ancient pacific creed that harmony must prevail under Heaven.

In the quest for harmony, for freedom with unity throughout the world, we British see ourselves with the American people as God's appointed leaders. So be it: leaders in a quest which is both religious and political. We know that the root trouble about "Versailles" was that the religion of the majority



including ourselves was not good enough. In a word, the "Ottawa" spirit, good as it may seem to British minds, does not meet the political requirements of the situation. There is in that spirit, whether in the British people or any other, what may rightly be described in religious language as the sin of presumption. That is the sin of unconscious arrogance, of bland superiority, of assuming that there is something in our existence so incontestably meritorious, in our Way something so right, that if other people do not sit at our feet, it is because they are reprobate whilst we are the elect. This spirit in politics bars the door to harmony. Even if "the Benefactor" be all that he thinks he is—and he never is, for, as our Lord saw, he hangs on to the material perquisites of lordship—the other people cannot bring themselves to acknowledge him. This is not original sin in them, but part of human nature's instinct for democracy: a profoundly real instinct, for God "made man in his own image" and God Himself in order to save the world had somehow to get off His throne. We are coming to see this in politics, but there are very few who see it in relation to the Christian religion. The two quests are one, for freedom cannot exist without harmony; nor is harmony real without the individuals who practise it have dedicated the free part of their wills.

## TWO PATHS OF VISION

In the light of the challenge which China presents to our consciousness, I see two paths along which our eyes are directed. One of the paths is that shown both negatively and positively by Mr. Mairé in his Supplement (No. 35): "The salvage of our culture depends visibly upon our reconciliation with the greater life in which we live and have our being. Many would now recall us to belief in God, but God will again fade into an abstraction or merely an Absolute Idea if we cannot recover a sacramental relation to the living Creation as an aspect of the Creator himself. . . ." The Chinese in the early days of their spiritual questing awoke to a consciousness of the sacramental in "living Creation" and it became part of their Great Tradition. Nature is not to be exploited, man-handled, forced into yielding up all her treasures for the satisfaction of man's limitless greed. Nature is to be obeyed,

to be served reverently, her generous impartiality to be made the model of man's life.

The other path is the one which I find my Anglo-Catholic friends so eagerly proclaiming. They affirm that we must get back to the truth which was exemplified in Mediaeval Europe. Men are not atoms of individuals but functional beings in vital relation to their fellow men, endowed with great natural duties the discharge of which is their blessing and their dignity. This view of man was also discovered by the Chinese people far back in their history. The "*Wu Lun*" (Five Relationships of family and social life including that of friend with friend) were recognised as the given element in life. A man was not a man unless by the cultivation of his personality these sanctities were upheld. Indeed the discharge of these obligations in humdrum act and the poetry of ritual did of themselves bring power in personality. The instincts for goodness with which Heaven has endowed man could not reach fruition except by these means.

Surely it is our duty and our profit to realise how much the Chinese people know about these two paths of vision. They have worked at them over a long period of time and with zeal of conscious thinking. Not that it means that the Chinese people have plumbed their value to the bottom: some of the best modern thinkers have penitently confessed to the ineffectual idealism which has devitalised the leaven in these convictions. But it means that we are not the only people, nor even the first, to discover and appropriate a measure of the grace in this revelation.

## NATURE AND GRACE

For me it is the question of Nature and Grace which presents itself with a new intensity to my practical mind. Is there some real sense in which the Grace of God comes to a people apart from the Church which has for the most part mediated His power and love? And what is Nature? Is it on a lower level than Grace, something which within its own territory of the mind must be held suspect, or is it something which must reinforce Grace, if Grace is to do its perfect work? An individual or a nation cannot despise Nature without coming to misappropriate Grace, just as they cannot despise Grace without coming to misappropriate Nature. Indeed, the two are interdependent.